

SAINT CATHERINE OF SIENA

everything when, according to her custom, she was rapt out of her corporeal senses, and carefully to write down whatever she then dictated. This they did heedfully, and compiled a book full of high and most salutary doctrines, which had been revealed to her by the Lord and were dictated by her, by word of mouth, in the vernacular speech."¹ In her last letter, Catherine simply refers to it as *il libra nel quale io trovava alcuna recreazione*, "the book in which I found some recreation"; and, although her friends and disciples thus describe her as dictating it to her secretaries while "rapt in singular excess and abstraction of mind," it is not clear that she herself would have made any claims of supernatural authority for it, or have regarded it as anything more than the pious meditations of a spirit "athirst with very great desire for the honour of God and the salvation of souls," one who (in her own characteristic phrase) "was dwelling in the cell of knowledge of self, in order better to know the goodness of God."

The book is concerned with the whole spiritual life of man, in the form of a prolonged dialogue, or series of dialogues, between the eternal Father and the impassioned human soul, who is here clearly Catherine herself. It seems to be properly divided into six treatises or *Trattati*: an Introduction (cap. I to cap. 8), the *trattato della Discrezione* (cap. 9 to cap. 64), the *trattato dell' Orazione* (cap. 65 to cap. 86), the *trattato delle Lagrime* (cap. 87 to cap. 134), the *Trattato della Divina Prowuidenza* (cap. 135 to cap. 153), and the *Trattato dell' Obbedienza* (cap. 154 to cap. 167).² It opens with a striking passage on what we may call the essence of mysticism, the possibility of the union of the soul with God in love:—

^{<f} When a soul lifts herself up, athirst with very great desire for the honour of God and the salvation of souls, she exercises

¹ *Legenda*, III. i. 2 (§ 332). Cf. III. iii. I (§§ 349, 350). In the Vatican MS., *Cod. Barb. Laf.* 4063, the book is entitled simply: "Il libro facto per divma revelacione de la venerabile et admirabile vergine beata Katherma da Siena."

³ The arrangement I adopt is a compromise between that of the manuscripts and early editions of the Italian text and that given by Fra Raimondo in his Latin version—a compromise which, as far as making the *Trattato delle Lagrime* a separate treatise, seems justified by Catherine's own reference to it in Letter 154 (63), as well as by internal evidence.